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SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL STRATEGY REPORT  
PART I, DRUGS AND CHEMICAL CONTROL -- URUGUAY 2007-08

REF: STATE 136787

¶1. (U) Following (in reftel requested format) is Uruguay's 2007-08 INCSR Part I.

¶2. (SBU)

URUGUAY

#### ¶I. Summary

Uruguay is not a major narcotics producing country. However, current areas of concern include increased trafficking of cocaine, marijuana, heroin and increasing local consumption of the highly addictive, cheap cocaine-based product known as "pasta base". In August 2007, law enforcement authorities seized 485 kg of pure Colombian cocaine at an airstrip in Salto Department. Efforts to upgrade port security and customs services advanced slowly in 2007, limiting inspection of containers at maritime ports and cargo shipments at the international airport. Free trade zones also afford relative anonymity for the movement of cargo, including illicit substances. The country's strategic position and its porous land border with Brazil further highlight its vulnerability to drug-trafficking. Uruguay is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

#### II. Status of Country

Uruguay is not a major narcotics producing country, but it continues to be attractive to drug traffickers from Colombia, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil and Mexico as a transit point. Limited inspection of airport and port cargo makes Uruguay attractive for contraband, possibly including chemical precursors, to Paraguay and elsewhere. Although precursor chemical controls exist, they are difficult to monitor and enforce. Relatively weak controls at the port of Montevideo contrast with the enhanced container security initiatives at other ports in the region such as Santos, Brazil and Buenos Aires, Argentina. According to the Government of Uruguay (GOU), shipping containers transiting to or from other MERCOSUR countries are rarely inspected in Uruguay. Colombian and Bolivian traffickers smuggled cocaine into Uruguay by flying directly into remote regions from Bolivia, using make shift airstrips located on foreign-owned residential farms.

Uruguayan counter-narcotics police units continued to target clandestine facilities, processing Bolivian coca and shipping refined cocaine north, but also distributing local "pasta base." The local demand for inexpensive "pasta base," again increased in 2007, as did the incidents of crime related to this drug, according to the Uruguayan National Police's counter narcotics division (DGRTID).

Domestic drug consumption consists mainly of marijuana that arrives in small planes or overland from Paraguay. However, Bolivian cocaine paste, or "pasta base", smuggled through Argentina and Brazil, is increasingly common in the marginalized neighborhoods of Montevideo, due to the drug's availability and extremely low cost (generally two dollars per dose). Additionally, in Uruguay, individual drug use is not viewed as a criminal offense. Rather, users are sent for rehabilitation in ever-increasing numbers, which has created an unexpected problem with which the GOU is not yet equipped to deal.

### III. Country Actions Against Drugs in 2007

**Policy Initiatives:** In 2007, the GOU continued to make counter-narcotics a policy priority. The National Drug Secretariat enhanced drug rehabilitation and treatment

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programs and continued demand reduction public awareness campaigns focused on minors and young adults. Uruguay is an active member of the Southern Cone Working Group of the International Conference for Drug Control, and other international organizations fighting narcotics, corruption and crime.

**Accomplishments:** In 2007, the GOU seized 658.6 kg of cocaine in both national and international counter narcotics

operations, a significant increase over the 417.7 kg seized in 2006. The GOU also seized 83.6 kg of "pasta base" in 2007, down slightly from 92.6 kg in 2006. The GOU also made 1,923 drug-related arrests, which lead to 486 convictions and resulted in 13 imprisonments.

**Law Enforcement Efforts:** Of the GOU agencies with charters for narcotics-related law enforcement, DGRTID continued to be the most effective. Internal coordination between these agencies remained difficult because they report to different ministries, but coordination between DGRTID and their regional counterparts continued to yield successful counter narcotics operations.

**Corruption:** The USG has no knowledge that any senior Uruguayan government officials engage in, encourage, or facilitate the illicit production or distribution of narcotics, nor are there any who encourage, or facilitate, the illicit production of drugs. Transparency International rates Uruguay as one of the least corrupt countries in Latin America. The GOU Transparency Law of 1998 criminalizes various abuses of power by government office holders and requires high-ranking officials to comply with financial disclosure regulations. Public officials who do not act on knowledge of a drug-related crime may be charged with a "crime of omission" under the Citizen Security Law. However, Uruguay's weak border controls remain an obvious area of concern.

**Agreements and Treaties:** Uruguay is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and the 1972 Protocol amending the Single Convention. It is also a member of the OAS Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD). The United States and Uruguay are parties to an Extradition Treaty—which entered into force in 1984—a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty—which entered into force in 1994—and annual Letters of Agreement under which the USG funds counternarcotics and law enforcement programs. Uruguay has signed drug-related bilateral agreements with Brazil,

Paraguay, Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Venezuela and Romania. Uruguay is a member of the regional financial action task force Grupo de Accion Financiera de Sudamerica (GAFISUD).

Cultivation/Production: There is no known large-scale cultivation or production of drugs in Uruguay. Although small marijuana plots have been discovered in previous years, none were found in 2007.

Drug Flow/Transit: According to DEA, Uruguay is used as a drug-transit country. Limited law enforcement presence along the Brazilian border and increased U.S. pressure on traffickers in Colombia, Bolivia and Peru is shifting some smuggling routes south, and drugs are moving through Uruguay by private vehicle, bus, and small airplanes. During a large-scale DGRTID operation in 2007, they intercepted a large shipment of cocaine directly from Bolivia, via a small plane landing on an improvised airstrip in the province of Salto.

Demand Reduction. Uruguay's demand reduction efforts focus on developing prevention programs, rehabilitation and treatment. They are based on a strategy developed cooperatively in 2001 between the National Drug Secretariat, public education authorities, various government ministries, municipalities and NGOs. In 2007 the National Drug Rehabilitation Center continued training for health care professionals on working with drug users, as well as sponsoring teacher training, public outreach, and programs in community centers and clubs. The program, known locally as the "Portal Amarillo," a drug rehabilitation clinic and hotline, continued services for both in-patient and out-patient drug users in northern Montevideo, targeting specifically "pasta base" addicts. Staffed by recent graduates of Uruguay's largest nursing school, it services about 200 patients a week and has 21 beds. Uruguay continued to develop methods to track trends in drug use in youth populations, including secondary schools and prisons.

#### **IV. US Policy Initiatives and Programs**

Bi-Lateral Cooperation: U.S. strategy has been to prevent Uruguay from becoming a major narcotics transit or processing country. Previously the USG has assisted the GOU by providing assistance for demand reduction programs, narcotics interdiction and police training. Lack of available program funds hindered forward progress on this strategy in both 2006 and 2007. In late 2007 the USG was renegotiating a letter of agreement to use 2007 end of year program funds. The LOA is still pending.

The DGRTID has reported that its greatest need is for more training for their officers in investigations, surveillance and money laundering. The need for equipment is always present as well, however the DGRTID has been focused on building a solid cadre of well-trained officers in order to carry out its counter narcotics missions. The dramatic half-a-ton drug seizure that the GOU made in 2007 is just one concrete example of the growing concern about drug trafficking, as previously advised by DGRTID authorities.

The Road Ahead: Uruguayan law enforcement authorities continue to work well with their regional DEA counterparts based in Buenos Aires. Embassy requests that INL consider a similar regional arrangement for small non-NAS posts such as Montevideo. The idea would be for a fully NAS-trained FSO to manage programs and budgets of the various non-NAS posts from a central location. This would avoid some duplication of effort, boost the level of subject material expertise and take advantage of economies of scale.

#### **IV. Chemical Control Issues**

GOU authorities indicate that Uruguay does not produce or import significant quantities of methamphetamine precursor chemicals. However, the same authorities expressed concern that ephedrine, pseudo-ephedrine or pharmaceuticals products

containing these chemicals could be passing through Uruguay  
in un-inspected shipping containers. End Report.  
Baxter